

Kittitas County

Violet Carollo Burke

A spirited woman with true grit, Violet Burke recalls the beetle infestation that struck the mountainous areas of Kittitas County in the mid-1980s. Violet, “After Albino died, I ran the farm by myself. The children were all gone and married. I farmed and Milton Downs did my



harvesting. I had so many trees with the beetle my forest was turning brown. So, in 1989 I started logging. Much of the place was like hair on a dog’s back. It was so thick in there and the trees were all dead. We logged off all the merchantable timber that had been killed by the beetle and left the seed trees. I requested that one thing. I said we do not want any of the big trees cut because we need the seed trees.

“Now, it’s really looking good. I couldn’t believe it when the trees started coming back. After two years, I went up there and trees were all over. I’ve been thinning and pruning my younger trees because I can’t reach a saw up into the larger trees.

“I really do enjoy the forest. It is so peaceful to go there and work. I fenced it all in and graze it to keep the fire hazard down.”

Violet lives on a 260-acre ranch, the homestead where her husband Albino Carollo was born and raised. Prior to their marriage, Albino purchased some neighboring property with money that he had saved for college. In 1952 they bought his parents' land. Albino earned a living by working in the coal-mine, then later for Boise Cascade. In 1982, Albino died from heart aneurisms.

Up to this point, the ranch was used primarily for running cattle and farming. But, the beetle infestation motivated Violet’s transition to forestry. She researched solutions and applied what she learned to rejuvenate the unhealthy forest.

Violet, “That’s how I really got started. Before that, I was focused on the field. I was going to make it or break it, one way or the other. I have 35 acres of farm ground, and we have 13 under irrigation. So, I put in gated pipe and transitional line for delivery to the fields. I did sell what’s out in front here, my two best fields. The doctor told me, ‘Violet, either slow down or go to the nursing home’. I said, ‘Okay, I’ll slow down.’ I didn’t tell my kids or anything. I just decided to put a sign out there by the road, ‘Property for sale.’ I had two pieces that were almost 20 acres apiece. My neighbor bought one. The sign was out there for one week and that was it.”

Michael, one of Violet’s three sons, moved back to live in closer proximity, helping his mother take care of the property by thinning and pruning trees. With Violet’s insistence, Michael built a pond for the local wildlife and cattle.

Violet began tree farming long before her involvement with the Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA). Her husband Albino joined the Western Washington Farm Forestry in the ‘40s, but they had not pursued anything beyond their membership. The Kittitas Chapter eventually disbanded, but was reinstated in the 1990s by Bob Monahan and Phil Hess. Together

they sent fliers and raised interest among the locals. Violet attended the first meeting and was elected the first secretary for the group, and has been active ever since.

The Teanaway River near Violet's ranch has been an item of controversy and frustration for Violet and her neighbors. In 1999 the river was labeled by the Department of Ecology as too warm for state specifications, which instigated a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study for the Teanaway River Watershed. This affected everyone living near the river, including Violet, who took the initiative to get involved. She was a driving force in encouraging community members to participate. The resulting community meetings were later expanded to larger groups including the Yakima Resource Management Cooperative, Fish and Wildlife, Forest Service, and the Audubon Society.

Violet recalls a scene from a meeting: "At this particular meeting, a girl got up and said, 'I would like to announce that we're going to do a TMDL on the Teanaway.' I can still hear someone saying, 'If you're going to do that, you best talk to that little gal right over there, because she lives on the Teanaway.'" Violet laughs, "The girl asked if she could talk to me at the break. Well, that ended up being a couple hours. She said they were going to meet at the Department of Natural Resources in Ellensburg. I said, 'This is Teanaway, so why are you meeting in Ellensburg? You can meet at the Grange Hall. I'm grange master and it'll be all right.' So we met at our Grange Hall, which overlooks this beautiful Teanaway Valley. We met there for three years.

"It was a good experience in learning that you can't just say what you want to say. They would talk about how the river was dirty because of farmers and loggers. We finally made them take every one of those things out of that draft. We said, 'You can't blame it on us.' And they did take it out of the draft. I don't know how we did it."

Her community has planted trees more than once along the river to create shade to cool the water.

In the course of her career, Violet has spent considerable time dealing with disputes over property rights and stewardship. She has also been involved with the Noxious Weed Board and received an award from the Soil Conservation Service for her efforts. "I've put on several workshops, trying to get small land owners to join with soil conservationists, trying to teach them about farming."

Violet also received an Environmental Excellence award from the Department of Ecology. Despite her acclaim, Violet shares the credit, "The award is the result of many people's efforts. Truly. I didn't do this alone."

A small woman with a big voice, Violet remains the spark that ignites her community.

"I really do enjoy the forest. It is so peaceful to go there and work"

BENO TREE FARM

Violet Carollo Burke, born September, 15, 1926

Albeno Carollo 1921-1982

Secretary Kittitas County Farm Forestry, 1995 - 2001

Department of Ecology Environmental Excellence Award, 2002